



King County's latest recycling incentive: praise

Faced with the rising cost of waste disposal, the county urges employers to recycle more

By DEIRDRE GREGG
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Shortly after Jesse LaRose started looking for ways to increase recycling at The Home Depot stores, he got a timely e-mail from King County.

The county wondered whether the Atlanta-based retailer was interested in working on none other than a recycling program.

Now, in a pilot program launched in April, three Home Depot stores in King County are recycling paper, cans, bottles, garden waste, plant pots, wood, building materials, metals and plastic shrink wrap.

"The main thing is that it's the right thing to do," said LaRose, Atlanta-based senior analyst with Home Depot. Employees and customers have been enthusiastic about the program, he said.

King County is trying to get employers to recycle more waste by launching a public relations campaign that calls attention to companies and organizations with aggressive recycling programs.

With its new "Best Workplaces for Recycling" list, the county is recognizing 21 companies, allowing them to tout an environmentally friendly credential that will likely prove popular with customers and employees. Among the companies on the list is Home Depot.

The move is part of a broader push that the county, like many other jurisdictions, is making to increase recycling as disposal of garbage has become financially — and sometimes politically — costly.



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The Redmond Home Depot store, managed by Andy Spencer, is one of three Home Depots in King County that are participating in a pilot recycling program.

In King County's case, the county is trying to extend the life of its Cedar Hills landfill in Maple Valley. Once the landfill is full, the county will have to find new, and probably much more expensive, options for garbage disposal. And with high fuel costs, the county is already facing significantly higher diesel bills for transporting garbage.

Meanwhile, other jurisdictions are grappling with similar issues. Seattle,

which handles its garbage separately from King County, is implementing a new zero-waste strategy, a move that will mean the city won't have to build a waste-transfer station in the city's Georgetown area that residents opposed. Other local governments and haulers are increasing rates or encouraging recycling.

"Best Workplaces" is part of a larger campaign that King County launched

last fall to try to increase recycling. To qualify for the "Best Workplaces" list, businesses had to meet 10 or more of 27 criteria, such as placing recycling containers at each work station, offering tips on how to increase recycling and buying recycled-content products.

Home Depot is using its King County program as a pilot for a nationwide recycling program. While most stores recycle some materials, LaRose said, the retailer will use lessons learned from the King County pilot when it rolls out a broader and more systematic recycling policy to other stores nationwide.

LaRose said the company has seen some reduction in garbage collection costs, but he's still calculating costs and benefits. Increasing recycling has meant additional labor and training, as well as some upfront costs for containers, equipment and signage, he said.

In addition to the public relations benefits of recycling, increased recycling can save money for businesses, the county says.

Many of the private haulers working for King County charge less for recyclables, which they can resell, than for garbage. Depending on the individual hauler, a business could reduce its garbage collection bills by as much as 20 percent to 50 percent by increasing recycling efforts.

Plenty of recyclables are going to the landfill. Each year county businesses discard about 250,000 tons of potentially recyclable material, with an estimated

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value of more than \$18 million, according to regular surveys conducted by the county's waste monitoring program.

Sharon Aller, environmental program manager for King County Solid Waste Division, said most people recycle — just not enough.

"Over 90 percent of people in King County recycle, but only about 50 percent of what can be recycled is," she said.

A consultant's study suggests that increasing recycling can be fairly easy. Some Seattle-area businesses that provided desk-side recycling containers increased recycling rates from 25 percent to more than 80 percent, according to a report by Cascadia Consulting Group, a Seattle environmental management consultant.

Increased recycling can save money for the county too, Aller said.

"At some point ... we will close our landfill and have to transport garbage out of the county," Aller said. It will cost more to ship that garbage long distances, probably by rail.

But recycling to date has already extended the life of the landfill by nine years, according to King County. Without recycling, the Cedar Hills landfill could have filled up late last year.

Recycling also saves the county money on fuel. Private haulers collect garbage and recycling from businesses and residents in the county. The haulers handle the recyclables themselves, but drop off the garbage at one of eight transfer stations. The county then trucks the waste from the transfer stations to the landfill.

Higher diesel prices in the past few years have taken their toll. The solid waste division spent \$360,000 more on diesel in 2006 than in 2005, a 19 percent increase. Those higher fuel costs have continued this year, Aller said.

The increased cost of fuel is a nationwide issue for the garbage industry. According to the National Solid Wastes

DISPENSING KUDOS

King County hopes public recognition will encourage employers to recycle more. The county's current Best Workplaces for Recycling are:

American Classic Homes Real Estate

Auburn School District

Bellevue Arts Museum

CDM

CH2M Hill

Covington Water District

Eco Cartridge Store

Emerald Heights

HDR Engineering

The Home Depot

Ikea

Julia's Restaurants

Kennedy Jenks Consultants Inc.

MulvannyG2 Architecture

Outsource Marketing

PCC Natural Markets

Philips Oral Healthcare

Port of Seattle - Sea-Tac Airport

REI Southcenter Store

Reprographics Northwest

Yoga Centers

Source: King County

Management Association, higher fuel prices cost haulers an additional \$800 million per year in 2005 compared to 2004, the most recent figures available.

"Many solid waste haulers and local governments throughout the United States are increasing waste collection rates in response to continuing increases in diesel costs," said David Biderman, general counsel for the Washington, D.C.-based association.

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